

Bitterroot National Forest, and complete analysis is expected by mid February 2002. Special concerns have risen within the perimeters of the 2000 wildfires because of the anticipated increase of noxious weeds due to the loss of canopy coverage, competitive native vegetation, and the increased ground disturbance. Noxious weeds are a problem of the past, present, and future. A shift from timber, shrubs, and bunchgrass vegetation to noxious weeds will cause a decrease in wildlife forage, reduction of species diversity, increased soil erosion, a decline in soil productivity, and a long term increase in overland flow, due to a decrease in surface cover. This analysis will focus on restoring native species and wildlife habitat while reducing runoff and erosion by controlling the spread of existing weeds and preventing the establishment of new weed species.

Public participation will be an integral component of the study process, and will be especially important at several points during the analysis. The first is during the scoping process. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments and assistance from federal, State, County, and local agencies, individuals and organizations that may be interested in or affected by the proposed activities. The scoping process will include: (1) Identification of potential issues, (2) identification of issues to be analyzed in depth, and (3) elimination of insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a previous environmental review. Written scoping comments will be solicited through a scoping package that will be sent to the project mailing list and local newspapers. For the Forest Service to best use the scoping input, comments should be received by May 31, 2001. Preliminary issues identified for analysis in the EIS include the potential effects and relationship of the project to human health risk, water quality, fisheries and native plant communities, wildlife habitat, soil productivity, recreation, scenery, heritage resources, sensitive plants.

Based on the results of scoping and the resource conditions within the project area, alternatives (including a no-action alternative) will be developed for the draft EIS. The draft EIS is projected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in September 2001. The final EIS is anticipated in February 2002.

The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date that the EPA publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

At this early stage, the Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers

notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of draft EIS's must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal, so that it is meaningful and alerts an agency to the reviewer's position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553, (1978). Also, environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft EIS stage, but that are not raised until the completion of the final EIS, may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1022 (9th Cir. 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 45-day comment period on the draft EIS, so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at a time when they can be meaningfully considered and respond to them in the final EIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns of the proposed action, comments on the draft EIS should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft statement. Comments may address the adequacy of the draft EIS, or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the statement. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act in 40 CFR 1503.3, in addressing these points.

Permits/Authorizations: The proposed action will not require any site-specific amendments to the Bitterroot Forest Plan.

Responsible Official: Rodd Richardson, Forest Supervisor, Bitterroot National Forest, is the responsible official. In making the decision, the responsible official will consider the comments; responses; disclosure of environmental consequences; and applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The responsible official will state the rationale for the chosen alternative in the Record of Decision.

Dated: April 5, 2001.

Rodd Richardson,
Forest Supervisor.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Intergovernmental Advisory Committee Meeting

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC) will meet on May 3, 2001, at the World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon, Portland, Oregon 97204. The purpose of the meeting is to continue discussions on the implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan (NFP). The meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m. and continue until 3:30 p.m. Agenda items to be discussed include, but are not limited to: Soliciting advice regarding the Future Direction of Adaptive Management Areas, sharing information about the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Framework, and illustrating how IAC advice was used in the development of the draft Aquatic Riparian Effectiveness Monitoring Plan and the FERC/ACS Short- and Long-Term Questions. The IAC meeting will be open to the public and is fully accessible for people with disabilities. Interpreters are available upon request in advance. Written comments may be submitted for the record at the meeting. Time will also be scheduled for oral public comments. Interested persons are encouraged to attend.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions regarding this meeting may be directed to Steve Odell, Executive Director, Regional Ecosystem Office, 333 SW 1st Avenue, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208 (Phone: 503-808-2166).

Dated: April 14, 2001.

Stephen J. Odell,

Designated Federal Official.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Notice of Proposed Change to Section 4 of the Alaska State Technical Guide

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Department of Agriculture.

ACTION: Notice of availability of proposed changes in the Alaska NRCS State Technical Guide for review and comment.

SUMMARY: It has been determined by the NRCS State Conservationist for Alaska